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CHARLES ELIOT NORTON

TWO ADDRESSES

BY

EDWARD WALDO EMERSON

AND

WILLIAM FENWICK LAPHAM

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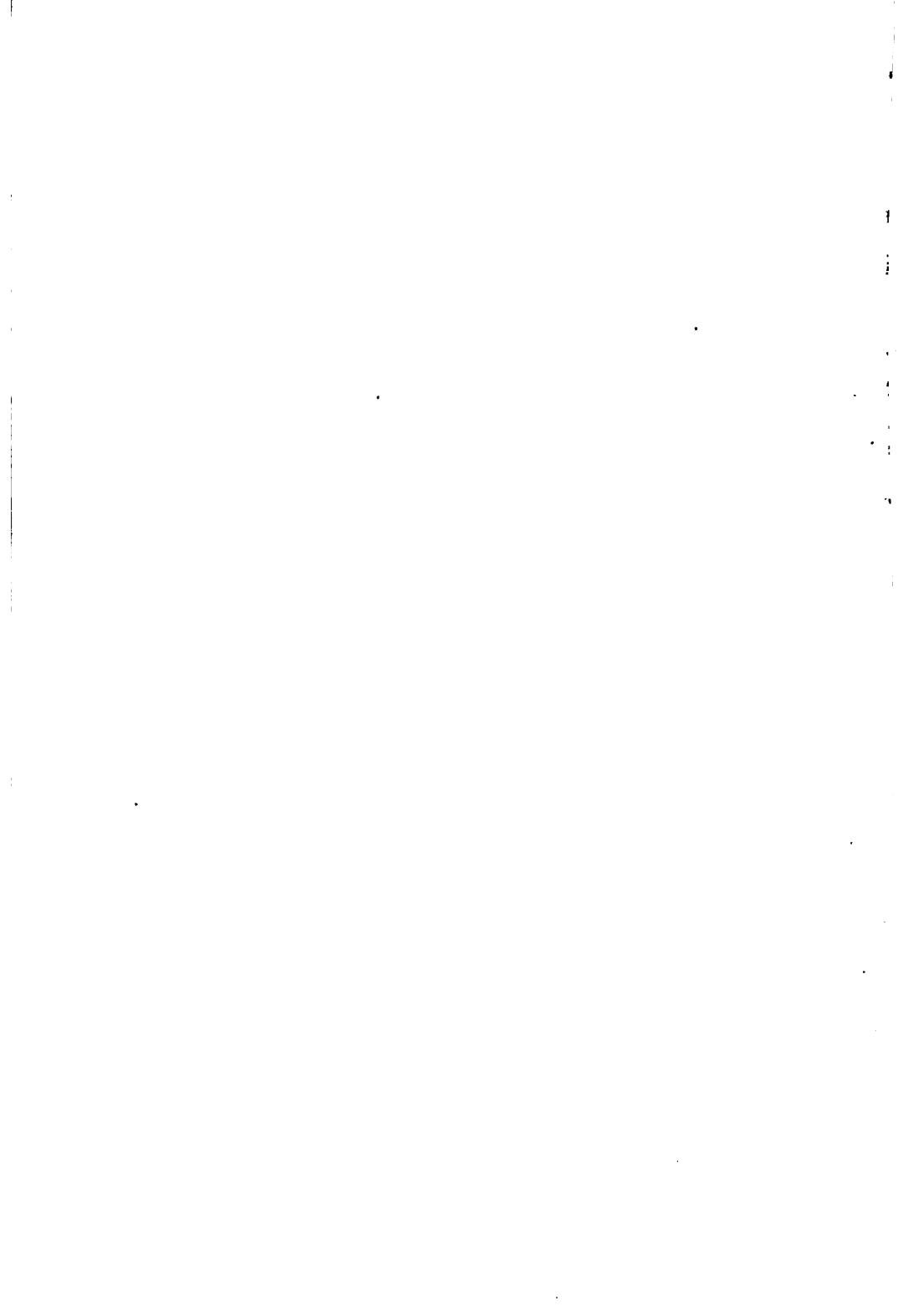
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CHARLES ELIOT NORTON



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CHARLES ELIOT NORTON

TWO ADDRESSES

BY

EDWARD WALDO EMERSON

AND

WILLIAM FENWICK HARRIS



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CHARLES ELIOT NORTON

**AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE A GENERAL MEETING
OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF AMERICA
IN TORONTO, DECEMBER, 1908**

BY

WILLIAM FENWICK HARRIS

CHARLES ELIOT NORTON

PROFESSOR NORTON was fond of repeating this story: One day he was seated at a public dinner next to William Hunt, a man who, as Mr. Norton expressed it, possessed a command of singularly piquant profanity, which he had inherited, not, however, from his father. Some discretion is necessary in repeating the anecdote. In a pause in the dinner, Norton drew from his pocket a small piece of Japanese artistry. Passing it to his neighbor, he asked if it was not beautiful. "Beautiful!" cried Hunt in great excitement; "why, Norton, that is the Damned Ultimate!" The expression, unnecessarily expressive though some may hold it to be, describes perfectly, I think, the effort of Norton's whole life. It was Howells, if my memory is correct, who said of him that of all the men of New England he had met, Norton was the one who had done the utmost possible with what Nature had given him. Truly his struggle was always to live up to the advice Peleus gave to his valiant son when he was setting out for the Wars,—

ἀὲν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπείροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων.

"Ever to strive for the best and to be preëminent over others."

And this was united with another quality, equally noble, a genius for friendship and a willingness to sacrifice himself in the effort to help any one who was

worth the helping. Colleague or young student, great man or struggling author, was ever welcome at Shady Hill, and always treated with that gentle courtesy of an older world, a courtesy that many have marked in Mr. Norton as possessing the most perfect democracy. Thomas Wentworth Higginson once told me that he had never seen any man so treat all the world, great or small, as so perfectly his equal, never condescending to the lowly nor subservient to the great. His willingness to give so ungrudgingly of his time has greatly reduced the possible product of his own pen; it has given to scholarship and letters, however, aid and encouragement not to be estimated. Numberless prefaces to books bear testimony of their authors' debts, and ours, too. It is true, I feel sure, that no one man in America has exerted a greater influence on other people's books than has Norton. Professor George Herbert Palmer once told me a charming story which well illustrates the desire to serve and the kindness of which I have spoken. In preparing the text for his edition of the poet whose name he bears, Palmer found it necessary to use the first edition of Herbert's works, but a copy was not to be had, although Quaritch, who is supposed to find anything, was authorized to offer an extravagant price for it. Learning that Norton possessed a copy, Palmer with some trepidation ventured to ask if he might use it for a day or so. Mr. Norton was leaving for his summer home at Ashfield, but nothing must do but Palmer should take the book for the summer. When not in use the treasure was

carefully locked away in a safe, and was returned the day the owner came back from Ashfield. Mr. Norton listened with great interest to Palmer's account of the profit he had had from the book. Next morning the latter found a neat packet in his hall, with a note to this effect in Mr. Norton's exquisite handwriting:—

“MY DEAR PALMER: I realized last night after you had gone, that this book belongs to you rather than to me. Will you please accept it?”

Another story, one of many, illustrates the same qualities. A young instructor in Cambridge was keenly anxious to possess a certain book of rarity and price. Norton had a copy, and knew the younger man's desires. Meeting the instructor one day upon the street, Norton remarked quite casually, “I have just seen a copy of your book at the Coöperative, and at a very reasonable price.” No time was lost in the purchase. It was only long afterwards that the happy possessor realized how strange it was that such a book should be in such a place at such a price.

The world at large saw in Norton a stern critic of all that was ignoble, and failed to recognize the genial urbanity that was his. Between Europe and America and the great men of both, he served as literary ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary. When the treasures of the great chest which stood in his library are published we shall know how well he served in this capacity.

Norton had graduated in the Harvard class of 1846

with Francis J. Child, George Martin Lane, and George F. Hoar. He "highly distinguished" himself in Greek and Latin, and "excelled" in political economy, technical official phraseology of the day, which, strange to say, really shows some prescience of the student's future life. His early experience and travels in the service of an East India house gave him that practical businesslike directness which always served him well. Travel in Europe, brief teaching in Cambridge, writing his volume of "Considerations on Some Recent Social Theories," editing his father's works, further travel in Europe, brought him to one of the greatest influences of his life,—John Ruskin. It was Ruskin, I think, more than his travels, which turned him to Italian art. A scene is reported where Ruskin and Norton were both present; Norton expressed, as was his way, a pronounced opinion on a technical point in Italian art. "How presumptuous, Charles," cried Ruskin. "You have no right to an opinion on such a subject!" But continued study and observance of the relations of art and humanity soon gave him a right to opinion on almost any of the larger subjects connected with Italian art. From these years began his study of Dante, in which he was ever perfecting himself. It is in this field that he accomplished the most in minute as well as large study; it is as a student of Dante that he is best known abroad, and it is as Dante's translator that his ultimate fame will probably rest. When we undergraduates used to listen to his comments on the "Divine Comedy,"

we thought they were the off-hand sayings of inspiration; when years later I had the privilege of dropping in at Shady Hill of a morning, I could note the teacher's chair between the window and the fireplace, surrounded by concentric rings of books five and ten deep, as he read the canto and prepared his remarks for later undergraduates. The final revision of his translation shows that even in his latest years he was keeping abreast of the most recent learning in subjects connected with Dante. His translation is both the most interesting and the most scholarly which has appeared. He has been thought of as a dilettant; he was, however, a great scholar who never became a pedant, one who could deal in generalities but always support his generalities by minute knowledge. In that he was a lesson and an inspiration to others. His deep learning covered an enormous field; he was polymath and practical bibliographer; specialists in many fields had recourse to him for information. His library was the Paradise of the bibliophile as well as the scholar, two types of humanity not often united in one man, or even resembling that loose union of apparent opposites which Plato describes in the "Phaedo." His many-sided scholarship, his power to transmute his knowledge into terms of a common humanity, his insistence on true excellence in scholarship and life, were a noble combination.

In the years after his return from Europe he was making splendid preparation for that Professorship to which he was appointed in 1875. He announced his subject

as "The History of the Fine Arts and their Relation to Literature." President Eliot has recently shown, in the Norton Memorial Number of the *Harvard Graduates' Magazine*, how rapidly the field of instruction in these lectures expanded, and how, throughout the whole series of courses, there ever remained prominent that intimate association of literature with the fine arts which characterized the initial lectures. It was to this broad humanity that thousands of Harvard students attribute lasting improvement in their modes of thought, their intellectual and their moral interests. He was the scholar all the time; but the boon his students got from him was the glimpse of a true and noble personality; he dealt with the fine arts, but his parish was the wide world; the facts one learned in his courses, many as they were, were not the main thing; it was the man and his tone that were of prime importance. Herein is the great debt which not Harvard men alone, but all Americans, owe him, just as to Jowett not only Oxford men, but Englishmen in general, owe a benefit which shall surely not pass with the generation which heard the spoken word. He dealt with important fractions of succeeding generations in their youth; and for years he held up to them the highest ideals of life, of conduct, of taste, of culture, and of politics. He filled a great many vessels which were sent out into the world. It is impossible to overestimate the influence which his teachings must directly and indirectly exercise upon the men whom he addressed and, through them, upon their children

and their friends. No American has had a larger audience of students. He dealt with the stream at its source, and his influence must be felt all through its subsequent course.

When the future biographer of Mr. Norton comes to his task, he will find one of his most interesting chapters in the foundation of the Archaeological Institute of America and of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, the material for which is very rich in the manuscript records of the early days of the Institute. In the course of years, extracts from these should be published, when scholars of the classics in this country will know fully the great debt they, their fathers, and their successors, owe to Mr. Norton. Both the Institute and the School were distinctly his ideas and his alone in their origin, so far as I can discover from searching of records and from diligent inquiry among the men of older days. Since his time, the records of the Institute and of the School have become practically a directory of scholars of the classics in America, and the work of both Institute and School may truly be said to have extended an influence far beyond the classical field. It was in 1879 that the Institute was founded; it was two years later that a committee was appointed looking to the foundation of the School. I think the idea of the School had been in Norton's mind from the beginning; he had certainly thought much of the Institute before 1879. His life and pursuits naturally were leading him in the direction of extending the field of his studies and

his teaching in many new lines. His interest in things Greek, always great, was constantly increasing. In the spring of 1878 his friend Lowell was in Athens. In that same year an appeal was made to the British public, by Professor Jebb, to further archaeological research by the establishment of an English School at Athens and Rome. The English appeal contained these words: "The student of Greek and Latin books should be made to feel that the Greeks and Romans were real living people, to have some clear knowledge not only of their laws and wars, but also of their social life and of the objects that surrounded them in their everyday existence, and to enjoy the most beautiful creations of their art in the light shed upon these from a kindred source in the masterpieces of their literature." Lowell's letters to Norton show the profound influence exerted on him by the Acropolis. I cannot help associating the presence of Lowell in Greece and the appeal of Jebb in their probable effect on Norton. At any rate, he was soon endeavoring to find out possible sites for exploration in Greek lands, and with that well-directed zeal which always marked his activities, going about among his friends, asking them for their coöperation in the formation of a society for the purpose of furthering and directing archaeological investigation and research. Such success did he meet that in April, 1879, a circular was issued asking for members for the proposed society. Among others joined to Mr. Norton in signing the circular were President Eliot, Alexander Agassiz,

Professor Goodwin, Professor Putnam, Martin Brimmer. Within a month, over a hundred members were obtained. I need not give a history of the Institute or of its work, for both are well known. It is of profound interest, however, to see the part played by Norton. He was the Institute. "Archaeological Institute of America?" queried one who did good work in the service. — "No!" "Archaeological Institute of New England?" — "No!" "Archaeological Institute of Boston?" — "No! Archaeological Institute of Shady Hill!"

Dr. Holmes, writing to Lowell on May 13, 1879, said, not without genial malice: —

"I had some talk (at the Saturday Club) last time with Charles Norton, who is greatly interested in an Archaeological Association of which he is the moving spirit. It is going to dig up some gods in Greece, — if it can get money enough. I suppose they may be required in some quarters to supply an apparent want."

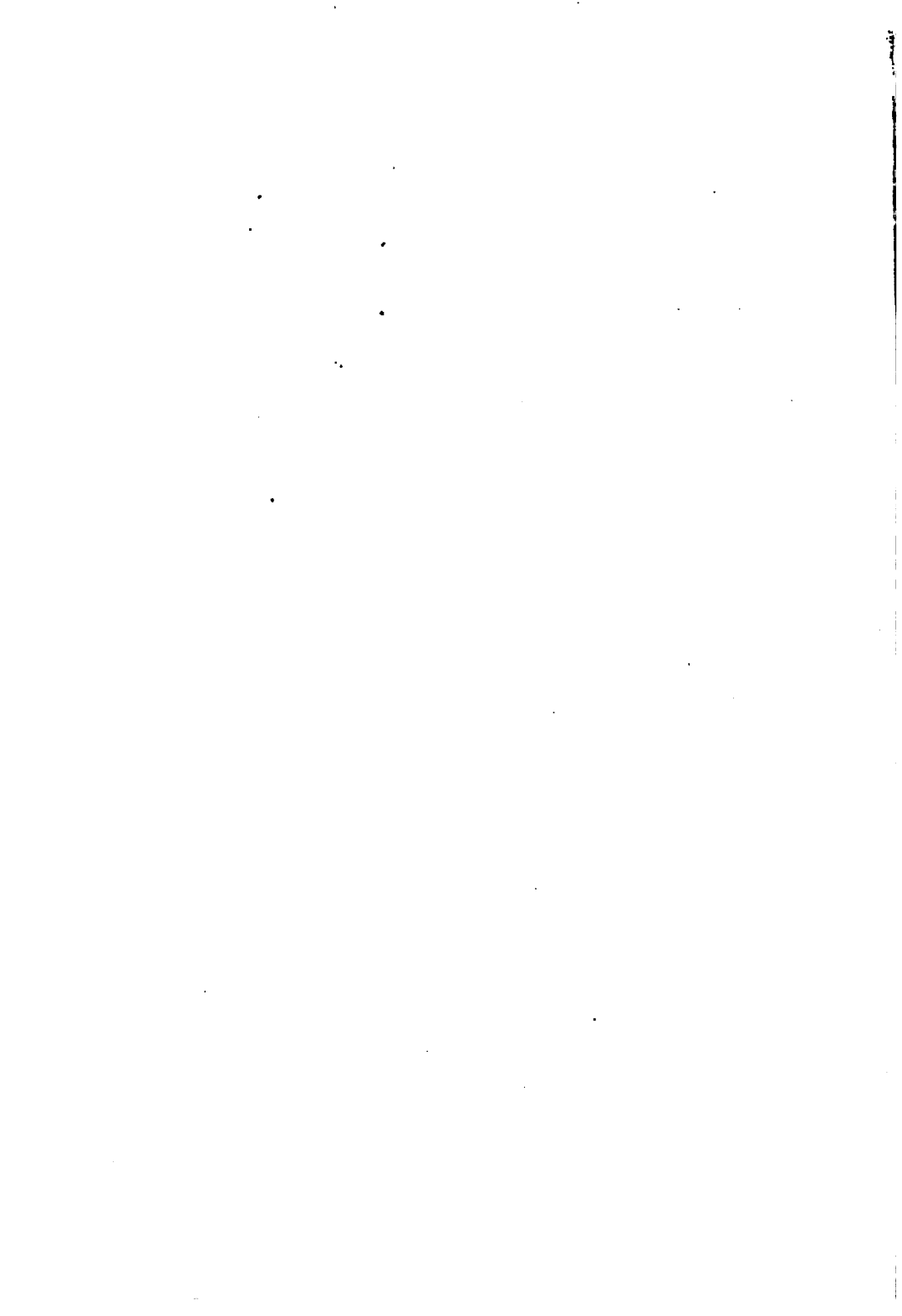
Charles Norton was indeed the moving spirit, and he was truly supplying an apparent want, even if the Institute has not devoted itself exclusively to gods in Greece. Meetings of the executive committee of the young Institute came with astounding frequency, the President always in the chair, and yet always, apparently, doing most of the talking and directing, though surrounded by a generous body of coöperators. It is astonishing to see how he anticipated practically all the problems which have faced the officers of the Institute in later years. He met every situation with

a sane radicalism; the dominant note was ever:—
“We want nothing but the best.” The best always costs a great deal of money, but where the treasury was empty, he still insisted, with far-seeing courage, on the best. “Mr. Norton stated,” a record reads, “that he had recently been to Providence, where he had spoken before a select audience in regard to the Institute, and had come back with a thousand dollars promised, and prospect of more.” The Institute was intended to further investigation in this country as well as in classic lands. The interest of the founder was, at that time, largely in things Greek, yet he ever generously favored liberal aid to research in America. To the gratification of all scholars and lovers of learning throughout the country, the idea of the Institute met with cordial coöperation on the part of our leading colleges and universities. The School at Athens was almost immediately founded. The Institute became one of the important means for the advancement of sound learning in America. Under Professor Norton’s catholic direction the work took a wide range; investigations were conducted at Assos in the Troad and in the southwest of our own country; the interests of architecture were fostered; the higher intellectual pursuits in the community were aided by a study of the close relationship of the art and thought of the ancient world to our own. And more than all else, he started a stream of American scholars to classic lands. These men have been inspired by an increased realization of the vitality and splendor of the life and litera-

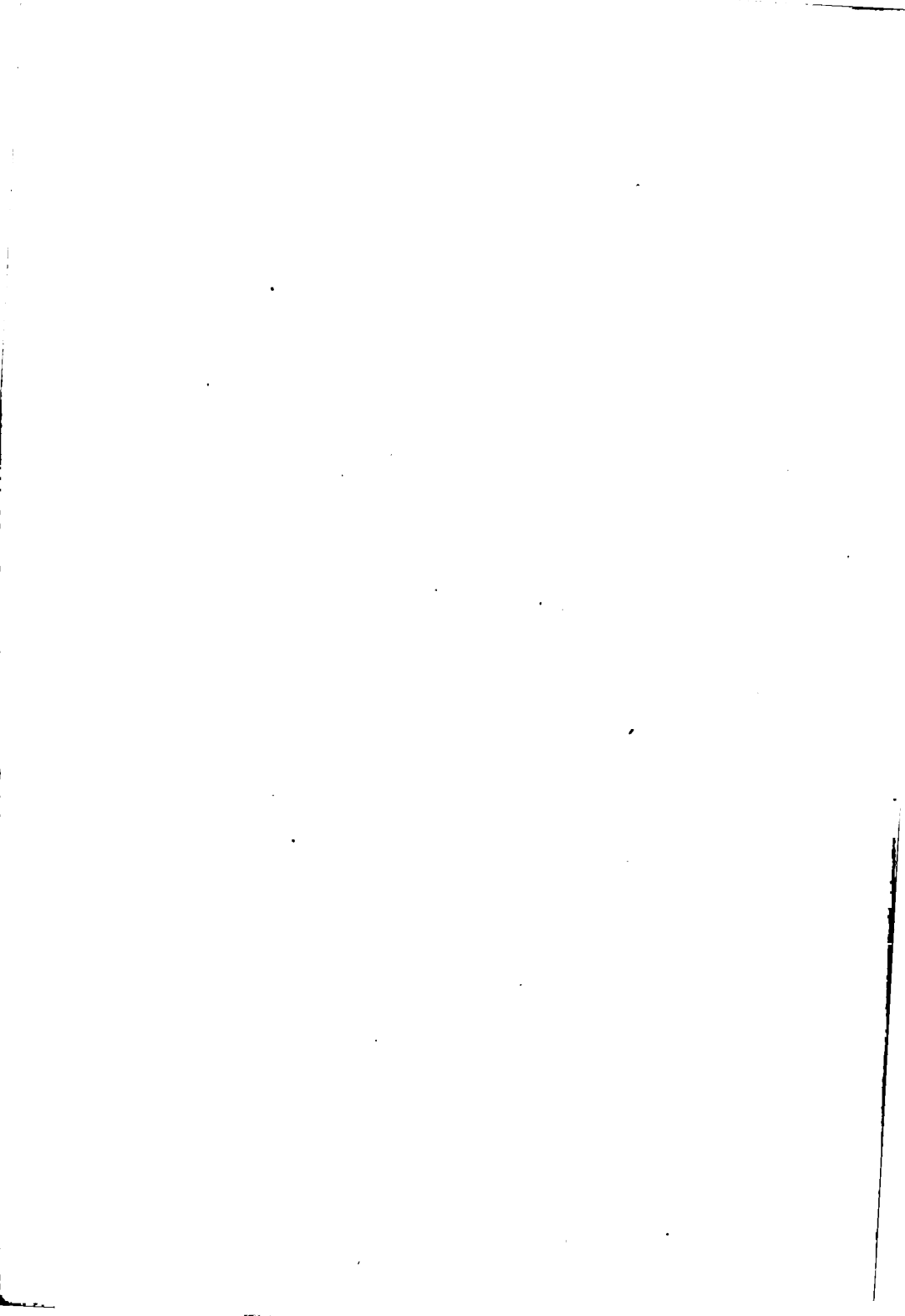
ture of the people who dwelt around the Mediterranean. And this inspiration they have brought back to innumerable pupils in this land, so that the seed of Norton's sowing has gone on, ever increasing.

Such is the debt which many of us owe. A larger body of students owes a broader debt to the quiet scholar who sat in his study and fearlessly expressed his opinion of the events that were taking place around him, exercising on the public at large the same influence which, as professor, he held over the students who attended his courses. That standard of true excellence to which he ever held himself, he insisted on for others, and men rallied about him all over the country. The simple existence of such a man with no private ends to serve, who is always ready and willing to tell his fellows the truth, and who does it clearly and unflinchingly, is a blessing to a community, demanding for its ennobling influence a gratitude that cannot be overpaid, stimulating and leading men to high achievement, and maintaining those qualities of dignity, of skill, and of high ideals which were so conspicuous in his own personality. That such a voice, so broadly heard, should issue from the study of a teacher is an inspiration. That is the highest debt which scholarship owes to Charles Eliot Norton.

*Ἀρετὴ δὲ καὶ θάνη τις οὐκ ἀπόλλυται,
ζῆ δ' οὐκέτ' ὄντος σώματος.*







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